

Disability Strategy Consultation

We discussed several key areas during the Zoom sessions on 17th and 27th April 2021.

1. Overall view

The young people felt that there were many potential barriers to their achievements because of their deafness, and that a strategy that could remove those barriers was important. They liked the idea of one strategy across the full lifetime and across all of government.

They felt that it was important for deaf people that the Strategy went hand in hand with a Sign Language Act. Everybody, especially young people, should be clear about their rights.

2. Key issues

The key issues identified were Health, Transport and Education. Employment and Policing and Justice were also important issues. The main concerns were for increased deaf awareness and more widespread access to communication and services through sign language. For those who were very confident in their deaf identity, it was clear that good communication support was essential to supporting their ambitions in school, in college and in life.

Young people felt strongly that better disability awareness (including deaf awareness) within public services and the general public would improve the quality of life for everyone, not just for deaf people. The young people did not want to have to stand out or ask for 'special treatment' but felt that more courtesy and patience would go a long way towards improving public services for all.

3. Healthcare

Access to interpreters was felt to be important. Basic deaf awareness is vital amongst front line staff, especially if dealing with emergencies.

Positives	Negatives/Suggested changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to arrange interpreters for planned treatment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health care electronic records should identify communication needs so young people don't have to ask every time they make an appointment. <p><i>"I feel like that whenever I book a doctor they should say "do you need an interpreter for your appointment". You don't need to email, phone call or asking parents 'Can you help me book an interpreter, please.' It's complicated to find one, not many interpreters in Northern Ireland, it's hard to find one."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples were given of problems with communication, made worse by the wearing of masks during the pandemic, and accommodations not being made. <p><i>"This happened during the very first lockdown. There is a deaf man who suffered from a stroke. Somebody called the ambulance for him, Apparently, two paramedics were wearing a mask, visor, apron, gloves and everything. He was telling them he was deaf, trying to tell them "I'm deaf, pull down the mask". They didn't want to pull the mask down in front of him for health and safety reasons."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency responders having some basic sign language is an obvious solution for

	<p>situations when there is no time to wait for an interpreter.</p> <p><i>“This is why we need Sign Language Act, for BSL to be taught in schools. Just the basic language like alphabet, what, where. To ask, where are you sore?”</i></p>
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4. Transport

Most people had experienced some difficulties with public transport, and felt that better deaf awareness would make a big difference.

Positives	Negatives/Suggested changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most young people use the Translink app to get live information on bus times and fares 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better training for bus drivers is essential <p><i>“I would be asking for a child single and they wouldn't tell me the price or they wouldn't repeat it.”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people didn't think expanding the Just a Minute initiative to cover deaf awareness was the solution <p><i>“I feel a bit uncomfortable. I wouldn't really want to be special treatment. I think I would just want bus drivers a little bit more deaf aware, not even deaf aware but just clear with what they are saying, I think it would be a big help.”</i></p> <p><i>“Hopefully one of the things (coming from the Strategy) is people will have that deaf awareness and not having to ask for special treatment. It should just be there day-to-day.”</i></p>

	<p><i>“I think that's a big problem naturally in society. Whenever you try to say you are deaf and they start giving you special treatment and you just want to be treated the same.”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announcements in stations and buses need to be accompanied by visual displays of important information <p><i>“I find with like train announcements I can't hear them so you miss out that piece of information. Let's say they are going to a different bus, you are missing out that information especially now with everyone wearing masks, you can't lip read them and your independence is completely taken away from you.</i></p> <p><i>“You have to rely on asking other people around you and it makes you feel stupid.”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology such as Translink not always kept accurate and up-to-date. Some young people have been caught out by fare changes not being updated.
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5. Education

Education was a top concern for young people in mainstream schools but not for the pupils at Jordanstown, learning in a ‘total communication’ environment.

Positives	Negatives/Suggested changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One young person described very good experiences with mainstream school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several young people said decisions taken earlier in their school career were now affecting their choices of Further or Higher Education courses.

The learning should be shared with other schools.

"I know with my GCSEs that I will be doing next year, three of my GCSEs have been taken away from me because one I had to do a single award. And the reason that was was because I was too scared to ask help and now I can't do what I want to do. And I think it's quite sad because if I wanted to be something in the fitness industry I need at least a double in science and I can't do that anymore."

"I feel like with languages it's just like one of those very big barriers you come to. Because when you go to secondary school you are offered to drop one of your languages if you want to because it's too difficult. But because that option is always there it's always playing in the back of your head."

- Young people didn't want to 'stand out'

"It's difficult because within my school, me and my sister are the only ones who are deaf. And we're the only ones with classroom assistants."

"It's difficult for people to understand being deaf means you can't hear and it's harder to get information. It's making sure you have all your needs put in and having somebody write out the notes for you and double checking using all the devices, but it does make you feel different from everybody else."

"Not just for a school that has deaf pupils, every school should be deaf aware. And they should be taught about disabilities just like English and maths, to make society better and more inclusive."

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers’ grasp on the available technology caused some frustrations – and in the very worst cases, some embarrassment. <p><i>“I also found it quite difficult too because my teachers were put through a course, a deaf awareness course by my teacher of the deaf. But somehow when I give them the FM they are still quite confused by it. They have been using it for two years and I got a new FM and it's handier and should be easier for them. But it gets annoying whenever they are constantly speaking in your ear and you are trying do your work and they are talking to another student. And they blame you because you hear what is going on with another student and it's our fault because we heard it.”</i></p> <p><i>“Can I just add this. There are multiple occasions where the teachers went to the toilet and forgot to mute themselves.”</i></p>
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6. College and employment

It was difficult for some young people to think ahead about issues they might face in the future. Many anticipated that they may experience difficulties and even discrimination in trying to find work. They felt strongly that disability awareness for all disabilities was vital, not just deafness.

Positives	Negatives/Suggested changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If they knew they could rely on access to interpreters or other communication support, that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerns that employers would make assumptions about what deaf people could and could not do and feel it

<p>would resolve any potential barriers.</p> <p><i>"I'm not worried about college, because I know I'll have a full-time interpreter there."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people understood that deafness could make certain jobs more challenging but felt that, with a combination of deaf awareness and technology, there were ways around most difficulties. • One young person had a strategy in mind to "start off small" before going for her ideal job, so she could develop experience and demonstrate evidence that her deafness was not a barrier. 	<p>would be easier for them to employ hearing people.</p> <p><i>"It's equality - it doesn't really matter if you are deaf or not. It's whatever is on your reference, your CV should matter the most."</i></p> <p><i>"I think if you are on the same level, the same exact CV, or the same level of experience and intelligence, deafness shouldn't be a reason why you shouldn't employ someone."</i></p> <p><i>"I think as well, processing information takes longer and then if people who want to employ people who are deaf and they take that bit of time to understand what is being said and you might feel we slow them down in whatever it is. It's unfair and it shouldn't be that way."</i></p>
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7. Justice and policing

Some young people were anxious about engaging with the police because the consequences of communication difficulties could be so serious and frightening.

Positives	Negatives/Suggested changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The availability of the relay interpreter service means police could use the 'interpreter now' app 	<p>Worries included</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being wrongly arrested • Inability to hear and respond quickly could be taken for obstruction

<p>to improve communication.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you were being interviewed as part of an investigation an interpreter would be booked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not understanding or asking for clarification could be taken as resistance <p><i>“I think they need more awareness of every single disability. Like say if it's something in a wheelchair, or someone who is deaf or someone who is blind, I think we get treated less.”</i></p> <p><i>“What if they are going to use pepper spray, and use it straightaway. Even if they tell you, you won't hear. They should write things down and be deaf aware and make life a bit easier and more patience with people.”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One young person had experiences that reflected this anxiety <p><i>“I have been stopped and searched with the family and it's been escalated because I couldn't hear what they were saying.”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would be useful for some police officers to learn sign language for frontline situations <p><i>“Even if one police officer in the unit learns sign language unit it could be really helpful.”</i></p> <p><i>“If you are going to be a police officer you are meant to protect us and be there for us. You have to understand what we need. So I think they should be going through some type of course. And with the new sign language law there's going to be more sign language classes as well. So there is no reason for them not to.”</i></p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If employers were provided with training they could be more inclusive without young people feeling it's that special treatment just for them. A commitment to equality for all is essential in employers. <p><i>"I feel like, if you want to employ a person you should facilitate their needs not just turn them away. You should be doing everything in your power to can try and do that."</i></p>
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8. Participation in sports, clubs or hobbies

Some used and enjoyed activities organised by deaf organisations, where they had no issues with communication. They felt that engaging in other activities demanded quite a high level of confidence.

Positives	Negatives/Suggested changes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One young person described 'training' the people providing the activity in deaf awareness and what communication support she needed. She was confident in doing this, but recognised that not everyone will be. <p><i>"Other deaf young people who maybe haven't got that confidence that might struggle to access things. I mean, if it's something after school or something like in a social capacity or if you are asking directly for somebody to be more deaf aware, I mean you have to have that confidence, don't you?"</i></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One young person described joining a football club where there was a whole big debate on whether or not he would be able to participate. Eventually the decision was that he could join, and he managed perfectly well. Assumptions people made about deaf people's ability could have blocked that.
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9. What would make a difference

- Better deaf awareness in Northern Ireland
- More widespread understanding and use of sign language
- Improved access to interpreters.